DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 325 430 SO 030 220

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TITLE Street Theatre: Drama as Method for Studying Contemporary American History.
PUB DATE Nov 89
NOTE 20p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Council for Social Studies, (St. Louis, MO, November 12, 1989).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Guides - Classroom Use - Guides (For Teachers) (052)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Class Activities; *Creative Teaching; Creative Writing; Creativity; Curriculum Enrichment; *Drama; *Educational Strategies; *History Instruction; Instructional Materials; *Modern History; Secondary Education; Social Studies; *United States History
IDENTIFIERS *Parks (Rosa)

ABSTRACT

Strategies and techniques for teaching history and stimulating secondary school students' awareness of and interest in the past is the focus of this document. Using drama as a tool enhances learning and maintains interest and attention by designing and acting out appropriate settings, historical circumstances, dramatic action, and historical characters. Drama is an imaginative way to involve students in exploring an historical experience and attaining and using research and inquiry skills. General procedures are included for: introducting the activity; setting due dates and length of time for the activity; grouping students; choosing a topic; discussing expected assignments; explaining how to collect data; and reviewing guidelines for designing each play. A guide is presented for the development of a Reader's Theatre that outlines characterization, plot development, and dialogue. A complete description of a classroom project, "Rosa Parks's Experiences in Montgomery, Alabama," is included as well as step-by-step guidelines for the "Living Newspaper Theatre Guidelines." (NL)

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STREET THEATRE: DRAMA AS METHOD FOR STUDYING CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN HISTORY

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Paper presented at the annual meeting of the National Council for Social Studies, November 12, 1989, St. Louis, Missouri.

SO 020 220

How can a teacher expect high school students to become excited about American history unless students experience and understand history in a personal way? To stimulate students' awareness of and interest in the past and expand their perspectives, particular historical experiences must be dramatized and vivified to internalize their meaningfulness. During the past 10 years of teaching high school American history courses, I have searched for strategies and techniques to help students reflect upon the past and convey to them the meaning of historical events, characters, and experiences. Several such strategies have used various forms of drama.

Drama can be useful in the American history classroom. Students can become involved directly in the teaching-learning process. First, drama is doing. Both the process and the product encourages active learning. The assumption is made that students absorb a lesson more readily if they learn it through experience than if someone else spells it out. Second, drama provides enjoyment for students, which reduces boredom, evokes curiosity, attracts learner attention, and increase student motivation. Without attention and motivation, subsequent learnings are weakened or negated. Third, drama provides a focus for students on given historical ideas, concepts, events, or characters for gaining understanding of human motivations and feelings. Fourth, dramas a learning tool enhances and maintains content comprehension and retention not only as students observe the results of drama but also by thinking through, designing, and acting out appropriate playable settings, given historical circumstances, dramatic action, and historical characters. And finally, drama is an imaginative way to involve students in exploring a historical experience using and attaining research and inquiry skills, such as defining a problem, locating

and collecting data, organizing and designing tasks, drawing inferences, creating and building interpretations, revisioning and editing, and applying data and interpretations.

The balance of this manuscript suggests a variety of drama activities for American history teachers to help students examine various social, cultural, economic and political events as viewed and lived by their participants during the 1960s and 1970s. These drama activities, known as Readers' Theatre, The Crankie, Puppet Theatre, and Living Newspaper Theatre, are adapted from popular culture genre used as entertainment and propaganda dorms during this time period. This manuscript describes (1) general procedures in using each genre as a classroom activity, (2) the guidelines for each drama form, and (3) a general evaluation activity for student learning.

General Procedures

The procedure involves: (1) introducing activity; (2) setting due dates and length of time for the activity; (3) grouping students; (4) choosing a topic; (5) discussing expected assignments from each group; (6) explaining how to collect data for designing each play; and (7) reviewing guidelines for designing each play itself.

Introducing the activity provides for a brief overview of what students will be doing. The introduction might describe how students will participate in a group activity to design and produce a 20-minute play and outline the purpose of the activity. Writing and designing each play should help students to use history as a living subject for studying various historical events of the 1960s and 1970s. Incorporating history in designing a play leads students to use history, capture its meaning, and understand this historical period.

Each activity should occupy approximately three weeks of class time. The first two weeks are for researching the topic and designing and rehearsing the play. The

time can vary according to the abilities of the students and the desires of the teacher. The classroom use of the activity accomodates all ability levels of students. Although all students should participate in researching historical information, some may be more adept at script writing, others at building props, whereas almost all can participate in acting out the scenes.

No single factor is an important to the success of each drama activity as the way students are grouped. The teacher may want to group the students or allow the students to form their own groups. Regardless of the method used, each group should be as balanced as possible by sex, ability, leadership, and assertiveness. The size of each group may range from six to eight students.

The teacher can assign a historical topic to each group or allow the groups either to select a topic from a list provided by the teacher or choose one of their own interest from the newspapers published during the 1960s and 1970s.

Besides doing research for designing and staging a 20-minute play, each group must produce a written program that gives the title of the play, a brief description of each scene, the names of each group member and his or her characterization role(s), a historical time line of the topic, a list of important historical persons involved with the event, and a bibliography of resources. The program provides the audience (the rest of the class) with historical background and information for understanding the play and reinforcing the historical information presented. The program should be distributed the day of the group's performance or the day before.

Each group needs the following steps for locating, collecting, and organizing the information to design their play:

1. Determine the event and its inclusive dates.
2. Use school, public, or college and university libraries.

3. Locate (a) original sources--newspapers, The Congressional Record, diaries, (b) secondary sources--textbooks, Readings, historical books.
4. Interview personally or by telephone individuals who witnessed event(s). Students' grandparents are an excellent source.
5. Collect the needed information such as eyewitness accounts, stories, and speeches. As the group collects information, the students should answer these types of questions: When did the event begin? When did it end? What actually happened? Where did it take place? What were its effects on individuals, society as a whole, and government?
6. Organize and outline the information called for in 5 into meaningful story.
7. Apply the information in writing and designing each group's play.

The teacher reviews with the class during class time the guidelines for creating each play and helps each group design and develop its play. Although the guidelines may appear complicated, they are not. The guidelines show students the simplicity of making each play. The teacher may want to eliminate portions of the guidelines because of time, age or ability of students. The guidelines should be arranged to meet the needs of students and the curriculum.

Reader's Theatre Guidelines

There are three basic parts for the developing of a Reader's Theatre: (1) the characterization, (2) the plot development and structure, and (3) dialogue.

Characterization

Characters should be held to a minimum so as not to complicate the story. No more than 4 to 6 characters are ordinarily advised for a Reader's Theatre play because any more are often confusing to keep in mind. The characters should be identified by name throughout the script in such a way that the student audience is conscious at all times of who is speaking and what is happening to whom and by

whom. Characters and their characteristics are made known by effective expression of the various characters' dialogue and how others describe and interact with others. The following types of characters might be included in a Reader's Theatre:

Men		Women	
1.	A leading man	1.	A leading woman
2.	Juvenile leads	2.	Second women
3.	Heavy men (villains)	3.	Sirens
4.	Character men	4.	Juvenile leads
5.	Comedians	5.	Character women
6.	General	6.	General

A character that plays a general role in Reader's Theatre is the narrator. Narration should be limited in its use. However, it does have some important functions when it is needed: (a) sets the stage for the story, (b) establishes the characters before the story begins, (c) explains action which cannot effectively put into dialogue, (d) summarizes incidental action which is necessary to the progress of the dramatization, (e) summarizes action which covers a long span of time, (f) provides transition from scene to scene, (g) gives details to settings, time shifts, costume, etc., which cannot be put into dialogue without delaying the action, and (h) closes the story which explanatory announcements clearing up any details left dangling in the story.

Plot Development and Structure

The development of a story plot evokes around a problem or a conflict is: (1) between two or more people, (2) between a person and his environment, or (3) between a person and him/herself. First a problem situation should be created and second the characters should be selected and allowed to do what they would naturally do under the circumstances. The story becomes a kind of a step-by-step biography of

a problem. From the moment when it begins to trouble the leading character, through his/her efforts to deal with it, to the point where it is, either temporarily or permanently resolved. The simpler the story plot, the more interest it creates.

The structure of the story plot is a series of sequential scenes divided into a two or three act play. Each act has a minimum of two to a maximum of five scenes placed in sequence. These scenes are the places where the action takes place: in an office, in a home, on streets, in a car, on a ship, etc. Scenes are unlimited as long as each scene can be identified by dialogue. A scene ends and changes to another when (a) a new character enters (except incidental characters, such as a maid bringing in tea), (b) an important character leaves, (c) change in setting occurs, or (d) a shift in time is made.

The following outlines may help further in clarifying the steps in a Reader's Theatre play:

<u>First Scene</u>

1. Summarize action up the time the play opens
2. Present the main characters
3. Establish locale
4. Get main action underway

<u>Second and Third Scenes and On</u>

1. Show characters, locale, and drama
2. Make progress toward creation or removal of obstacles
3. No scene is justifiable which does not advance action

<u>Next to the Last Scene</u>

1. Prepare the way for conclusion.
2. Remove final obstacle
3. Provide a solution if possible

Last Scene

1. Conclude play
2. Should be brief

Dialogue

There are two basic types of dialogue: (1) language of action--suggesting what is happening "now", and (2) language of exposition/ narration--conveys background information to prepare listeners to understand what is going to happen. Of the two the most important is the language of action. The functions of this type of dialogue are: (a) to explain action which has gone before, (b) to explain the present stage of affairs, (c) to explain action going on but not seen by the audience, (d) to prepare the audience for the action which is to come, (e) to carry the action forward, (f) to emphasize some item in the setting; perhaps to help create a mood for the show or to all attention to properties which are going to be used, (g) to emphasize some characteristic of a player, and (h) to prepare the listener for changes of setting, mood, time, or introduction of new characters.

The following methods ought to be used to have effective dialogue:

(1) Employ a predominance of short sentences. Of course, the length of sentences should vary with the mood; but with longer sentences the effect of movement is aided by breaking up the sentences into shorter units.

(2) Variety in sentence structure is helpful, although in most instances, simplicity should predominate. Bear in mind, however, that simplicity sometimes depends even more on a simple development of ideas or deliberate action than it does on grammatical form.

(3) Include references to things the characters are doing which are necessarily a part of the plot action.

(4) Do not allow any lines which do not contribute to the main purpose of scene.

(5) Let action accompany lines frequently. Try to avoid a dialogue situation in which two or more people are simply talking to each other. Let each line help carry the story forward and advance plot action. Write for the action, not for clever lines or word twists. Dramatic action should depend upon the turn of events, not the turn of a line.

(6) As far as possible keep the action in the present tense. Do not allow the actor or narrator to spend too much time telling what was done before the scene opened.

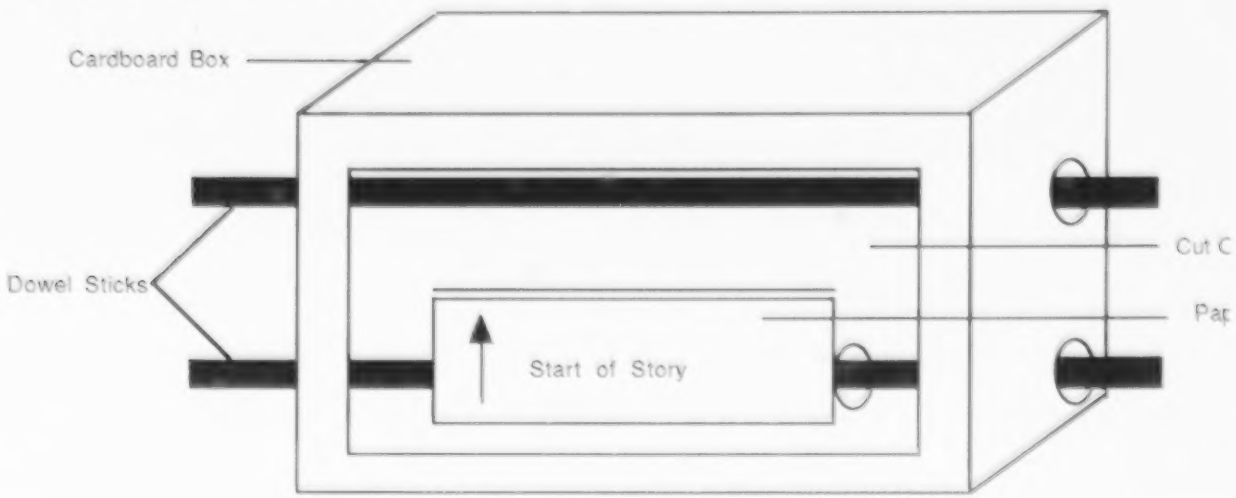
The Crankie Guidelines

Each group develops a storyline from their research. The story line is translated into fifteen to twenty panels drawn, in color or black-and-white, on long pieces of butcher paper. The size of each panel may vary, but any panel less than three feet by three feet is usually too small to be seen by the rest of the class at presentation time. Each group plans an explanatory lecture, based on each of the panels, to provide a narrative account of their crankie. Music may also be used to give feeling and mood.

While the crankie is being drawn, one member of the group ought to be building the frame to house the drawings. This frame consists of a large cardboard box with two dowel sticks needed to roll and unroll the paper from panel to panel. Figure 1 shows how the frame is built

Students prepare and rehearse their presentations before giving them before the class. The presentation requires two students to turn the crankie and usually one to give the narrative.

Figure 1 - The Crankie Frame



An Example of a Crankie Design

The following scenario demonstrates how one group of students collected their information and designed their crankie.

A group of three girls and one boy was selected by the teacher. The group chose for its topic Rosa Parks and the Montgomery bus boycott and held an initial planning meeting in class to decide the responsibilities of each member. The students discussed locations where the information might be available and settled on assignments for each member.

The next meeting took place in class the following day when the group pooled what information had been found. Three members had located various primary and secondary sources, but the fourth member had found nothing. this member was sent to the school library to find additional information the fourth student had found in the school library. The group continued to edit their outline until they were able to settle on a chronology of situations and events they judged to be correct.

The group's next step was to bring together the various events surrounding Rosa Park's experience in Montgomery to form a chronological, narrative story. They delineated the particular situations that would be made into drawn panels, which consumed one day, both in and out of class. The following are the titles of the twenty panels:

Panel #1: Title

Panel #2: Credits

Panel #3: Restaurant, blacks and whites segregated

Panel #4: Inside a public bus, blacks and whites segregated

Panel #5: Rosa Parks -- a brief biography

Panel #6: Rosa Parks -- experience as a NAACP member

Panel #7: Rosa Parks working at a tailor shop

Panel #8: Rosa Parks standing in line waiting for a bus

Panel #9: Rosa Parks paying bus fee

Panel #10: Rosa Parks sitting in the white section of the bus

Panel #11: Whites get on bus, no place to sit, upset with Rosa Parks

Panel #12: Bus driver orders Rosa Parks to give up her seat to a white passenger

Panel #13: Rosa Parks refuses

Panel #14: Rosa Parks is arrested by police

Panel #15: Rosa Parks is sent to jail

Panel #16: E. D. Nixon, president of the Montgomery Chapter of the NAACP, posts bail for Rosa Parks

Panel #17: Rosa Parks is charged in court with violating a city segregation ordinance

Panel #18: Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., calls for a black boycott of the Montgomery bus system

Panel #19: Boycott begins

Panel #20: Boycott ends 381 days later

Panel #21: Tribute to Rosa Parks by Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr.

Panel #22: Tribute to Rosa Parks by E. D. Nixon

Panel #23: The End

Drawing the panels and writing the narrative took the group two days. Three students drew the panels while the other member wrote the narrative and constructed the crankie box. As a group, they rehearsed with two members turning the dowel sticks and the other two presenting the story. On their assigned day, they gave a successful, knowledgeable presentation.

Puppet Theatre Guidelines

The basic parts to create a puppet theatre are: (1) characterization, (2) plot development, (3) dialogue, (4) puppet construction, and (5) scenery design.

Characterization, Plot Development, Dialogue

All of three of these elements for designing a puppet theatre play are similar to the guidelines for designing Reader's Theatre (refer to Reader's Theatre guidelines above.)

Puppet Construction

There are many types of puppets. For this activity, the simplest puppet design seems to work best: The Rod Puppet. The rod puppet is cut from stiff paper or cardboard. The figures are painted on the cardboard. Small sticks are attached to the bottom of the cardboard by means of paper staples or glue. The rod puppet is easily manipulated and can provide the student groups with a wide variety of characters for even the most weakly cast story.

Scenery Design

Scenery can add realism to the play. An effective way to design scenery for a puppet play is to make a Box Theatre:

* Materials:

  Large cardboard carton

  3 or more sheets of cardboard (approximate size of face of carton)

  Strips of lightweight lumber

  Tacks

  Glue

  Paint

* Procedure:

Cut away the top of a carton. Cut out one side to make the stage opening. Reinforce the carton with strips of wood. Paint the theatre and decorate it to taste.

Tack or glue (or possibly both) cardboard sheets to wood strips long enough to extend over sides of theatre. Paint curtain on one and appropriate backdrops on others. Cutaway a portion of the bottom of the carton so the puppets can be manipulated back of the curtain but in front of the backdrops.

The Living Newspaper Theatre Guidelines

Three basic parts are necessary to create a Living Newspaper play: (1) plot and scene development, (2) characterization, and (3) scenery design.

Plot and Scene Development

There are five steps in developing a plot. The first step identifies the focal event of the play. The original writers of the Living Newspaper selected a news event from the newspaper and made it the main issue for a play.

The second step researches as much information as possible on the event and the problem behind it. The information should include the chronology of episodes that made up the event, any historical background that might explain why the event took place, the people who participated in, viewed, or were affected by the event, any

written commentaries or editorials discussing the event, and any government, organization, or society action or reaction to the event.

The third step involves analyzing any problems leading up to the event or caused by it. This was the principal impetus behind the original Living Newspapers. This step is to produce information that induces particular influential attitudes in the audience, provokes some degree of protest, and indicates some line of action or recommended solution. The researched information is arranged in chronological order to indicate any problem or problems that either helped perpetuate the event or were caused by the event. On the basis of this outline, a number of questions should be posed: How can the situations of the event be improved? What are the solutions to the problems? Who can help solve these problems? What is the role of government, church, business, or other societal organizations? Answering these questions becomes the climax of the plot.

The fourth step is to design a multiple-scene play from both the research information and the problem analysis. The Living Newspaper did not use "acts" as most conventional plays do. Instead, it used rapid-action scenes. Each scene is a setting for a given circumstance arranged in a series of related incidents to tell a story. For this activity, 15 to 25 scenes are appropriate. Although there are a number of possibilities for designing the development of the scenes, the two most common are the chronological story and the historical survey. The chronological story reflects the chronology of developments of an events, ending with a proposed solution of, or societal reaction to, the problem the event poses. The historical survey begins with a dramatic opening of a contemporary event, followed by scenes that provide historical background on the event,and concludes with scenes analyzing possible solutions to the problem presented by the event. The various scenes in a Living Newspaper usually take this form:

Introductory scene -- Introduction of a major contemporary social problem through some dramatic event.

Middle scenes -- Development of either historical or contemporary incidents and situations where characters interact to discover reasons for the problem.

Concluding scene or scenes -- Developing the happy ending, or what can be a happy ending if social, economic, or political conditions are met to resolve the problem.

The fifth step involves writing and using dialogue. The following suggestions are useful in creating effective dialogue:

(1) The loudspeaker -- off-stage narration can introduce the play, give background, tie in various scenes, and sometimes conclude a play with recommendations and challenges. Also, it can provide continuing narration to explain events of a pantomime scene.

(2) The question/answer sequence--two or more characters exchange questions and answers about how an event took place and how to deal with a problem, or they debate activities of a particular event or situation.

(3) Montages of quoted speeches--short excerpts of speeches are given quickly by a number of characters usually in reaction to a particular event or situation.

(4) A single argumentative speech--one character reads a speech either to evoke a reaction or a react to a particular event or problem.

(5) Real-life character situation--characters portray real-life people who were involved in the situations upon which that play is based.

(6) Argumentative dialogue--two characters, true-life or fictional, present an argument or differing points of view.

(7) Mass chants--primarily a propaganda form of presentation; a group of characters provides a choral response or reaction to a problem or solution.

(8) Levels--a development of a point/counterpoint of various *** alternative solutions to be analyzed and discarded until one solution remains. Levels are where characters representing various views are paired strategically at different places on the stage. A light shines on each character at a given time to allow the character to given an opinion. (Because most classrooms do not have a stage light or spot, have students stand with their backs to the audience. When students respond, their characters face the audience and when finished, they assume their original position.)

All characters should use exaggerated movements and actions. Emotion is very visual and extreme. Although makeup and costuming are not necessary, they help to differentiate the characters.

Scenery

If scenery is desired, keep it simple. The scenery should give the audience a sense of location. There are three ways to design scenery, all of them common to the Living Newspaper. Scenery can be made by cutting up cardboard boxes into any shape desired and painting it with either tempera or spray paint. Old bedsheets are excellent for backdrop scenery as they can be painted into a number of scenes and also they are easy to attach to the wall with thumbtacks or hang from the ceiling with hooks. Slides can be projected behind a sheet or onto a blank wall.

General Evaluation

Evaluation of the plays consists of two steps. The first evaluates the mechanics of the group process from the beginning of the assignment of the end of the presentation. This step should keep students on task and help them be responsible for their various assignments. By monitoring each group every day of the project and using an observation form such as the one in Figure 1, the teacher should be able to evaluate the effectiveness of each group.

In the second step, the teacher debriefs each play individually and,upon completion of the assignment as a class, the plays as a whole. Debriefing determines command of content information, how well the central concepts of the activity are understood, and students' ability to apply historical information to the design of the play and to present-day situations. The focus is always on the activity as it relates to understanding events of the 1960s and 1970s. Before each presentation, each student receives a handout of questions to answer during and after the presentation. From this handout (see Figure 2), the teacher conducts the debriefing.

Figure 1. Living Newspaper Observation Form

Group Members Role
1.
2.
3.
4.
5.
6.
Presentation theme(s):_____

Time: from _____ to _____

Plot: Scene 1 _____

Scene 2 _____

Scene 3 _____

Scene 4 (etc.) _____

Comments:

Responsibility:

Cooperation:

Information gathering:

Task production:

Figure 2. Living Newspaper Debriefing Form

Living Newspaper presentation: _____

1. What is the major focus of this play? _____

2. Based on what you have seen, what conclusions does this play illustrate? _____

_____

3. What specific facts, concepts, or generalizations in this presentation justify these conclusions? _____

4. What particular scene or scenes bring out the major focus of the Living Newspaper? _____

5. How can these conclusions be applied to the historical topic we are now studying?

_____

6. Are these conclusions consistent with those of the other Living Newspaper plays? Why? Why not? _____

7. How are these conclusions applicable to current society? _____

8. Do you agree or disagree with/accept or reject these conclusions? Why? _____

_____

9. What questions do you feel that this group should have asked in their presentation? _____

10. How can this presentation be improved? _____

Conclusion

The four theatre types are historical mediums that capture the emotional drama of various historical topics and events of the 1960s and 1970s. As techniques, they can stimulate student curiosity of the past. They can also provide a creative outlet to make sense of historical facts by putting them into meaningful associations and relationships. They can make American history vivid, interesting and understandable to many students.

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Date Filmed

March 29, 1991